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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR PERRY VISITS KONO WITH UN DELEGATION

¶1. Summary: On March 18, Ambassador Perry joined a UN-led delegation on a one day tour of Koidu City and its environs in the Kono District of Eastern Sierra Leone. The group met with local leaders and observed several ongoing development projects to evaluate the region's future needs. The delegation was made up of key members within the Diplomatic Corps, Donor Community and members of government. Their presence renewed hope within the Kono community by pledging their commitment to ensuring that the district regains its past glory as an important business center. End Summary.

¶2. On March 18th, Ambassador Perry joined a UN-led delegation on a one day tour of Koidu City and its environs in the Kono District of Eastern Sierra Leone. The Deputy Minister for Local Government, the Minister of State from the Vice President's office, the District Chairman, the Koidu City Mayor, and the Paramount Chief comprised the host country's interlocutors. The group began the day by examining a German Technical Cooperation (GTZ) project focused on resettling youth from urban mining areas to their villages of origin. With the international community's assistance, promoting migration back into rural areas has recently become a central theme of the Koroma administration. The delegation then moved to a meeting with local authorities, dignitaries and traditional leaders where they discussed the city's developmental constraints. The Chairman of the Kono District highlighted the need for better roads as they would facilitate the construction of water and sanitation systems, schools, hospitals, irrigation channels and other needed infrastructure.

¶3. Ambassador Perry also had the opportunity to meet with the Ngaiya market women in the Nimikoro Chiefdom. The women appealed for assistance in refurbishing their market buildings and for vehicles to transport goods from rural areas to cities like Koidu and Makeni (Note: USAID has provided assistance to markets and cooperatives in the past. End note). Ambassador Perry expressed appreciation for the enthusiasm exhibited by the women and promised to work with her diplomatic colleagues on the appropriate action. The USG is presently assisting 14,000 farmers in the Eastern Region through the USD 13 million PAGE (agricultural/environment) programs.

¶4. Comment: The local leaders called upon Ambassadors and the UN/ERSG to make statements, which focused primarily on the need for unity across party lines to ensure further progress in the country. We expect requests for special self-help funds to further develop the grassroots cooperatives. End Comment.

PERRY